



The California Master Plan for Education

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About the Superintendent of Public Instruction & the California Master Plan for Education

Who is the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI)?

The SPI is a person who is elected in a statewide election, just as the Governor is. However, unlike the Governor the SPI position is “nonpartisan,” which means candidates for the position are not identified by political party on the ballot.

What does the position currently entail?

The SPI has three jobs:

- To keep an eye on all K-12 public schools, to ensure they are generally operating as required by law and are providing a high quality education to all students.
- To act as secretary and executive officer of the state board of education by providing staff assistance to the board. The Governor appoints all the members of the state board, who collectively determine issues ranging from curriculum standards to textbook approval.
- To act as Director of the State Department of Education, by managing that department as any other state agency. The Department of Education calculates the amount of state funding each local school district is eligible to receive and generally serves as a source of advice and information to school districts on education programs.

Do the SPI and the Governor work together for students?

The Governor and SPI will only work together if they choose to. Since they are independently elected at the state level they can, and often do, pursue their own separate education agendas.

Who is in charge of K-12 education in California?

Many people think the SPI is in charge of K-12 education in California, but in truth the Governor has far more real power over education. Unfortunately, there is no designation in the law that requires either of them to be held ultimately accountable to parents or students for the quality of California’s schools or education system.

Does the SPI currently have any authority to appropriate money for education in the state budget?

No. This is another example of how the Governor currently has more real power over education. Each year, the Governor develops the draft budget, which contains his recommendations for items to be included in the budget and how much money should go to each of them. Then the members of the Legislature can (collectively) modify that draft, which means they can take out items put in by the Governor, they can substitute different amounts of money from what the Governor proposed, and they can put in new items with new amounts of money for them. The budget then goes back to the Governor. In California the Governor can use the “line-item veto” to reduce or eliminate the amount of money the Legislature has approved for any of the items in the budget. The only way a

Governor's line-item veto can be reversed is by a further 2/3's vote of the Legislature. The SPI has no say over the amount of money appropriated in the budget.

What is the Master Plan for Education?

The Master Plan for Education is a long-term, strategic plan for a single, seamless system of education from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education that will produce better schools and higher levels of student achievement in every school, college, and university. The main objective of the plan is to focus the education system on student success.

What changes does the Master Plan recommend with respect to the SPI and the Governor?

Simply, the Master Plan recommends that responsibility for two of three of the SPI's current job functions – namely, managing the Department of Education and staffing the State Board of Education – shift to the Governor. This rearrangement would benefit California education in the following ways:

- It would align the *responsibility* for leadership of statewide education programs (managing the Department of Education) with the one person who holds major *authority* over the budget, namely the Governor. With both responsibility and authority finally in one office, the Governor will be accountable to students (and their parents) for meeting their education needs.
- It would focus the SPI on the single task of making sure schools are providing a high quality education to all students. This would include managing student assessment, reporting school performance to parents and the public, and ensuring compliance with specific laws, such as those protecting civil rights and special education services.

This concept is not altogether foreign. As a note of reference, most state agencies are currently under the control of the Governor – such as the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), wherein both the responsibility for meeting the motor vehicle registration and driver licensing needs of all Californians, *and* the major budget authority to carry out that responsibility, reside with the Governor. He or she is therefore directly accountable to Californians for the quality of those functions.